



Charter Review Commission

City Hall | Training Room, Lower Level | 101 First Street SE

March 1, 2022 | 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

The Charter Review Commission will hold an in-person meeting on Tuesday, March 1, 2022 at 12:00 p.m. in the City Hall Training Room.

Purpose of the Charter Review Commission:

The Charter Review Commission shall review the existing charter and may, within twelve months, recommend any charter amendments that it deems appropriate to the council.

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Welcome
3. Approval of February 7, 2022 meeting minutes
4. Review of stakeholder letter and recipients
5. Discussion of need for or interest in commission member interviews with specific stakeholders
6. Assignment of work groups
7. Discussion of public input forum
8. Adjourn
 - a. Future meeting dates
 - b. Future agenda items

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Charter Review Commission

City Hall | Training Room, Lower Level | 101 First Street SE

February 7, 2022 | 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Committee Members Present: Gary Streit, Mugisha Gloire, James Klein, Dave Lodge, Mary Kay McGrath, Jim Sherman, Amy Stevenson, Monica Vallejo, Monica Vernon

Committee Members Absent: Mary Kay McGrath

Staff Members Present: Jeff Pomeranz, Angie Charipar, and Vanessa Chavez

Elected Officials Present: Mayor Tiffany D. O'Donnell

The meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m. by Chair Gary Streit.

Chair Streit invited Commission Members to introduce themselves by sharing their name, where they currently work, and their first job in Cedar Rapids.

Chair Streit outlined the resolution adopted by the City Council in November 2021 bringing this Charter Review Commission together and Commission's charge to review the existing Home Rule Charter. Per the resolution, the review will be completed by May 1, 2022. The Commission will create their recommendation to provide to the City Council for consideration and implementation. He asked if there were any concerns regarding this task.

Chair Streit was asked if the Charter will be divided into section areas for the group to focus on. He shared that would be the plan. The Commission will create separate work groups and assign sections of the Charter for review. The subgroups will take sections of the Charter and bring recommendations to the full Commission. The workgroups will be assigned, there will be a public input session, and the final recommendation will come from the culmination of those recommendations and input.

Mayor O'Donnell welcomed the Charter Review Commission to the first meeting of the group. She is highly appreciative of the members serving and expressed that the decisions they will be making are very important to the community.

Chair Streit highlighted that the Charter Review Commission meetings are public meetings. The Open Records Law and the Iowa Open Meetings Law will apply. City Attorney Vanessa Chavez gave an overview that highlighted the following:

Open Meetings Law

- The quorum for this group will be 5 Commission Members or more. This is the required number of Members to have a formal meeting. There cannot be a group of 5 or more participating in discussions or taking action outside of a publicly posted meeting.
- Using 'reply all' to Commission emails should be used with caution to eliminate the risk of creating an electronic meeting.



City Attorney Chavez was asked if all discussion relating to the Commission done by an individual Commission member would be subject to the Open Meetings Law. It is only applicable if there are deliberations or actions taken. Commission Members can express their opinions and/or gather socially with other Commission Members without it being a public meeting.

Open Records Law

- Any communications or documents related to the work of the Commission may be subject to this law.
- City staff will work with Commission members to respond to any of these requests.

City Attorney Chavez was asked if it is recommended that Commission Members use their personal or professional email for communicating. Commission Members should use the email that they are most comfortable being disclosed to the public.

City Attorney Chavez was asked if written notes are also applicable for this law. She will review that and verify if that is applicable. The work that you do will be reported back to the full Commission, and that will be on the official record of the meeting and minutes. Individual notes would not be necessary.

City Attorney Chavez was asked what an example of email requests might be. Someone might ask to see communications relating to the Charter Review Commission. Someone might ask to see communications specific to scheduling of meeting dates.

City Attorney Chavez was asked about preservation of records. She confirmed that all items in your inbox and your trash items would be relevant.

Chair Streit confirmed that a series of proposed meeting dates will be provided to the group via Doodle poll to coordinate future meeting dates. Commission Member Vernon asked if Zoom would be a format that is possible. It was confirmed that this would be possible. Meetings will typically be hosted during business hours for one-hour. Commission Member Vallejo shared that a standard schedule would be helpful.

Chair Streit mentioned that meeting format and decision making would be up to the Commission to decide. He proposed that a super majority would be beneficial for the voting structure. He will be tasking the group with sharing recommendations for stakeholders that are a cross-representation of the community we can reach out to for feedback/input.

Chair Streit was asked what questions would be asked of stakeholders. He shared that it would be asking for their written comments on how the Home Rule Charter serves them and their organization. Assistant City Manager Charipar stated that City staff and Chair Streit would work to draft the letter together for distribution.

Chair Streit was asked if there is a way to track the cross-section of stakeholders. He hopes to get good feedback from the Commission to ensure we are reaching individuals with experience in diverse groups across the City. It will ask how the form of government impacts their lives and their ability to thrive in the City.



Assistant City Manager Angie Charipar confirmed the final report from the 2011 Charter Review Commission will be distributed again with a link to where the report is on the City website. City team will work on the scheduling of meetings and distribution of stakeholder letters.

Commission Member Monica Vernon inquired about expressing interest in specific work groups to participate in on the Commission. This information should be sent to the staff liaison, Angie Charipar. Monica feels that there are items relating to run-off elections she would like to provide input on and discuss with the Commission.

Mayor O'Donnell inquired about what the Commission's breakdown will be. Chair Streit reviewed the breakdown of the 2011 work groups. Each group would have a topic and he tentatively outlined that the work groups would include sections as follows:

- Preamble, Article 1, Article 2
- Article 3, Article 4
- Article 5, Article 6, Article 7

Chair Gary Streit motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commission Member James Klein moved to adjourn, seconded by Commission Member Amy Stevenson. The meeting was adjourned at 12:50 PM.



March 1, 2022

Name
Organization
Address
Cedar Rapids, IA XXXXX

Dear _____:

The Cedar Rapids City Council appointed a Charter Review Commission in November 2021 to fulfill the requirements of the Home Rule Charter adopted in 2011. I am pleased to serve as Chair of the current Commission.

The Charter Review Commission has been charged with reviewing the existing Home Rule Charter and recommending any charter amendments we deem appropriate to the City Council. We will conclude our work no later than May 1, 2022.

We are reaching out to request your input that can be utilized in our review. Your written comments can be shared with the Commission by emailing them to CharterReview@cedar-rapids.org. We invite you to share ideas or feedback you may have regarding how the Home Rule Charter serves you or the organization you represent. In order for your input to be considered in our analysis, it is important that we receive your comments prior to March 16, 2022.

If you have questions or comments regarding this request, you are welcome to contact the Commission's City staff liaison, Angie Charipar, at a.charipar@cedar-rapids.org.

Sincerely,

Gary Streit
Chair
City of Cedar Rapids Charter Review Commission



Stakeholders List

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Email
Tom	Aller	2001 Corporation	
Dan	Gross	Aavin Private Equity	
Terry	Kouba	Alliant Energy	
Jon	Dusek	Armstrong Development Company	
Brendan	Paul	Bever Park Neighborhood Association	
Kevin	Platz	Board of Realtors	
Kate	Hogg	Cedar Valley Neighborhood Association	
Marlene	Chramosta	Cherry Hill Park Neighborhood Association	
George	Heeren	Cleveland Area Neighborhood Association	
Phil	Jasper	Collins Aerospace	
Jennifer	Tibbetts	Continuum of Care	
Dustin	Kern	DK Land Services	
Karen	Kurt	East Central Iowa Council of Governments	
Doug	Neumann	Economic Alliance	
Okpara	Rice	Four Oaks	
Benton	Frey	Frey Homes	
Melissa	Olson	Greater Cedar Rapids Housing & Building Association	
Susan	Forinash	Hall & Hall Engineering	
John	Hansen	Harbor Neighborhood Association	
Shannon	Thompson	Hunter Companies	
Patrice	Carroll	ImOn Communications	
		Inter-Religious Council of Linn County	
Drew	Retz	Jerry's Homes	
Erica	Yoder	Kenwood Park Neighborhood Association	
Charlie	Rohde	King's Material	
Lori	Sundberg	Kirkwood Community College	
		League of Women Voters	
Ben	Rogers	Linn County Board of Supervisors	
Stacey	Walker	Linn County Board of Supervisors	
Louis	Zumbach	Linn County Board of Supervisors	
Clint	Twedt-Ball	Matthew 25	
Carol	Sndelar	Mound View Neighborhood Association	
Tim	Stevens	Noelridge Park Neighborhood Association	
Al	Pierson	Northwest Neighbors Neighborhood Association	
Dorothy	De Souza Guedes	Oak Hill Jackson Neighborhood Association	
Jim	Sattler	Sattler Homes	
Kyle	Skogman	Skogman Companies	
Bonny	Kurian	TATA Consultancy Services	
Steve	Nylin	Taylor Area Neighborhood Association	

Marty	Lenss	The Eastern Iowa Airport	
Chad	Pelley	Twenty40 Building Concepts, Inc.	
Randy	Ramlo	United Fire Group	
Kristin	Roberts	United Way of East Central Iowa	
Michelle	Niermann	UnityPoint Health	
Heather	Friedman	Vernon Heights Neighborhood Association	
Eric	Gutschmidt	Wellington Heights Neighborhood Association	
Monica	Vallejo	Westdale Area Neighborhood Association	



Tentative Workgroup Assignments

Workgroup 1: Preamble; Article I—Powers of the City; Article II—City Council

Amy Stevenson
Mary Kay McGrath
Gary Streit

Workgroup 2: Article III—Nominations and Elections; Article IV—City Manager

Monica Vernon
Dave Lodge
Monica Vallejo

Workgroup 3: Article V—Departments, Office, and Agencies; Article VI—Conflicts of Interest, Board of Ethics; Article VII—Charter Review and Amendments

James Klein
Jim Sherman
Mugisha Gloire

Cedar Rapids can help put ranked choice voting on the agenda in Iowa

The city charter is undergoing a decennial review, which could include talk of changing the city’s election system.

Staff Editorial

Feb. 21, 2022 6:00 am



The Cedar Rapids City Council chamber at City Hall on Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2013, in southeast Cedar Rapids, Iowa. (Jim Slosiarek/The Gazette)

In an opportunity that only comes around once every decade, Cedar Rapids is [reviewing its city charter](#).

The charter establishes the basic rules for city government — composition of the city council, powers of the mayor and qualifications for the city manager, for example. This is only the second time Cedar Rapids has embarked on the review process since adopting a home rule charter in 2005. The commission will recommend changes to the charter, which the city council must either adopt or send to voters for a referendum.

Some of the new [Charter Review Commission](#) members have close ties to city government, which suggests this is not meant to be a slate of bold change-makers. But there is at least one issue where we hope they will give serious consideration to big changes — the city’s election process.

Cedar Rapids is one of relatively few cities in the state that holds runoff elections after the regularly scheduled November contest if no candidate in a race for mayor or city council wins a majority of votes. Even in the best case scenario, it’s a clunky system that needlessly drags out election seasons later into the year.

“ *Our experience from last November shows why this option would be useful.* ”

There is a better way to vote and we encourage commission members to consider it — [ranked choice voting](#). The system isn’t currently allowed under Iowa law but that shouldn’t stop local leaders from starting a discussion about it.

Ranked-choice or instant-runoff elections have the same effect as traditional runoffs but they are conducted on a single ballot. In a race with three or more candidates, voters rank their choices. If no candidate receives more than 50 percent of first-preference votes, the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is cut from the field and the tallying scheme repeats until one candidate has majority support.

Several other states are experimenting and there seems to be growing interest from across the political spectrum in alternative voting methods. In Iowa, however, the issue hasn’t yet received serious attention from policymakers.

Cedar Rapids has an opportunity to help put ranked choice voting on the statewide agenda. Our experience from last November shows why this option would be useful.

When no candidate won a majority in the Nov. 2 mayoral election, it went to a [Nov. 30 runoff](#) between the top two vote-getters, Tiffany O’Donnell and Amara Andrews.

Partisanship was a key theme in the non-partisan contest, with Andrews openly running as a Democrat and also trying to cast O’Donnell as an ardent Republican. That was borne out by their fundraising and spending — the Andrews campaign had connections to a long list of Democratic funders and operatives while the O’Donnell campaign too was doing business with a few firms usually associated with Republicans.

“ *It seems likely O’Donnell would have easily carried the day in a ranked-choice scenario by drawing second preferences from most of Hart’s voters. It would have saved everyone the time and resources that go into holding an extra election.* ”

This was all perfectly legal but voters have a right to know about it in due time. That’s where the real problem emerged: Because of the way the election calendar lined up with the Thanksgiving holiday, finance reports that would have been due the Thursday before the runoff were [pushed to the following Monday](#), just one day before the final votes were cast. Voters likely would have been better informed if the process hadn’t lingered into the holiday season.

And it could have been even messier. In the general election, Andrews [barely edged out](#) former Mayor Brad Hart for a spot in the runoff election, besting him by fewer than 100 votes. If Hart had called for a recount, it might have delayed the already abbreviated early voting period.

In the end, the runoff wasn’t exactly a nail-biter. [O’Donnell won](#) more than two-thirds of the vote. She had already won a sizable plurality of the votes in the initial contest and she was widely seen as more closely aligned with Hart, who endorsed her in the runoff.

It seems likely O’Donnell would have easily carried the day in a ranked-choice scenario by drawing second preferences from most of Hart’s voters. It would have saved everyone the time and resources that go into holding an extra election.

The first step toward a different system would be for the Iowa Legislature to pass a law allowing local governments to adopt ranked choice voting. The Cedar Rapids Charter Review Commission could explore including language in the charter to say the city will adopt ranked choice voting when and if it becomes an option.

Commission members could also ask the council to establish some sort of task force that would engage experts and stakeholders to continue studying the issue and make further recommendations outside the decennial charter review process. Later charter amendments can be made by the council or proposed by citizen petition.

Unfortunately, the commission’s work is off to a late start. The timeline doesn’t lend itself to a robust discussion about the city’s foundational governing document.

The [current charter](#) only specifies that the commission will be established in 2011 and every 10 years thereafter and make any necessary recommendations within 12 months. In this case, though, the city council didn’t confirm commission members until late last November. The panel didn’t hold its first meeting until early February and most of the work is expected to be complete by late April.

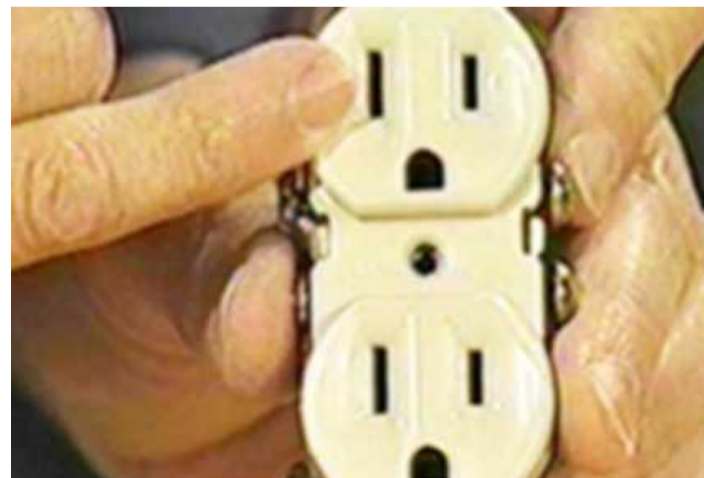
The charter commission should consider clarifying its own establishment for future years. They could require the commission to be appointed by a certain date to ensure there is ample time to do a thorough review of the charter and consider plenty of public input. They should also specify a minimum number of commission members, which the charter does not currently include.

Even with the short time frame, officials say they are committed to seeking public input. Speak up now because you might not get another chance until 2031.

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